

Double-take on a big lake

By **Marty Basch**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

ALTON BAY, N.H. — “Tickety-boo,” the man sipping coffee outside the lakeside information booth said in response to my “good morning.” “Well, tickety-boo to you too,” I replied. “They say that in Scotland,” said volunteer Vic Jones, who opened the tiny office and let us in to get a few brochures. “It means everything is OK.” The expression, made popular in a Danny Kaye song for the 1958 film “Merry Andrew,” set the tone for an A-OK day trip around half of New Hampshire’s Lake Winnepesaukee.

The mission was simple: Combine a bicycle ride with the M/S Mount Washington, which cruises to various ports around the state’s largest lake. Bike some. Boat some.

Credit for a bike-and-boat adventure goes to my partner, Jan Duprey. About a decade ago, we did a couple of multiday spring tandem rides around ski areas, pulling skis and snowboards behind us. After two frosty rides, Jan informed me we were switching to summer B&Bs. Tandem means a lot of togetherness, so this time we took a road bike each for the 30-mile spin from the summer resort town of Wolfeboro to the tourist kitsch of Weirs Beach. Board the boat to placid Alton Bay, then pedal the remaining 12 miles back to Wolfeboro.

Lake Winnepesaukee, ringed by the Ossipee Mountains, Sandwich Range, and Belknap Mountains, covers some 72 square miles and has over 200 islands. It is a summer playground filled with motorboats, sailboats, and jet skis. The beauty of the boat is seeing what was missed from a bicycle seat.

With the goal of a 12:30 p.m. Weirs Beach boat, the cycling started early from Wolfeboro’s Back Bay. Solitary runners and walkers were out as we pedaled south on Route 28 (Main Street). Three wide-eyed golfers were already putting on a green. The morning sun lighted the white South Wolfeboro Meeting-house, giving it a stately appearance. The moderately hilly route, with varying shoulder widths, was no place for novice cyclists, but fine for seasoned riders. Route 28 was wonderfully wide as it took us up to look down on the lake. But better vistas awaited.

Tiny shops like the East Village General Store made it easy to stop for cold drinks. And the 4 miles

along the deliciously shaded Route 28A to Alton Bay were largely a downhill delight, though a bit bumpy at times. The road had all the signs of summer: cottages, steps to the lake, Adirondack chairs, stone walls, docks, cramped parking, and a sandy beach.

Like Wolfeboro, Alton Bay was sleepy, but a few boaters entered the town docks near a gazebo and diner. Still hours from noon, it was too soon for the enticing waterfront tastes of french fries, seafood, or ice cream. Instead, we met Jones as he was opening the information booth. Ahead, the road changed to Route 11 west with initial glorious stretches along the 5-mile arm of Alton Bay and out to the lake. Hikers were active; the parking area to 1,786-foot Mount Major was half filled with vehicles of those trekking to some of the best Lakes Region vistas.

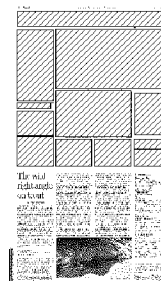
Route 11’s shoulder sometimes became a thin white line. Serious cyclists know about “riding the white line,” an expression used for hugging a narrow shoulder. With traffic picking up, the road was a tad snug at times. But a mile diversion along Scenic Drive took us by the sandy beach of Ellacoya State Park, wide expanses of lake scenery, a postage-stamp-size rocky beach, and a host of bikers, walkers, and runners enjoying the lakeside road to Gilford.

Weirs Beach and its carnival atmosphere were ahead. But first it was time to tackle the steeps. Two sharp pitches followed the marinas and Meadowbrook US Cellular Pavilion, dropping us both to quick-spinning low granny gear. To mellow out, we opted for the tree-lined and snaking Dockham Shore Road with its cottage rentals and manicured homes. A final downhill took us to Weirs Beach and its strip of shops, restaurants, and amusements.

With an hour to kill before the boat, margaritas and some appetizers at The Crazy Gringo were rewards before the M/S Mount Washington pulled in for the long line of camera-carrying passengers, including a wedding party. Cyclists boarded last, and the bicycles were easily stored in the bow.

As a jazz keyboardist tickled the keys and a buffet line emerged, we sat outside in the shade while the boat took its hourlong voyage through the Eagle Island narrows and by scores of islands, resplendent homes, and even a castle. We snoozed a tad on the cruise before disembarking in Alton Bay for the 12-mile spin back to Wolfeboro along the same roads.

The Wolfeboro docks by Cate Park were busy as



weekenders ordered Italian ices and ice cream to consume along the water. We headed for the Wolfe-trap, an airy bar and grill, to toast the end of our trip. It was so tickety-boo.

Marty Basch, a New Hampshire-based writer and author of "The White Mountain Ride Guide" (Top of the World Communications, 2007), can be reached at marty@martybasch.com.

If you go . . .

M/S Mount Washington

Weirs Beach

603-366-5531

cruisenh.com

Runs through Oct. 28 with seasonal stops in Weirs Beach, Center Harbor, Meredith, Alton Bay, and Wolfeboro. The schedule changes, so check the website.

Fares: 2½ hours, adults \$25, children 4-12 \$12, under 4 free; two hours, adults \$22, children \$12.

New Hampshire Department of Transportation's Bureau of Rail and Transit

603-271-2468

nh.gov/dot/nhbikeped

Free bicycle maps of the seven regions in New Hampshire, including the Lakes Region.

Lakes Region Association

603-744-8664

lakesregion.org

Information, events, and vacation guides.



BIKE AND CRUISE

See the beauty of Lake Winnepesaukee from land and from ship at explorenewengland.com.



PHOTOS BY MARK WILSON/GLOBE STAFF

A leisurely Lake Winnepesaukee cruise aboard the M/S Mount Washington combines well with an energetic cycling tour of Alton Bay and its hill-rich environs. Bob and Sadj Bartolo, both triathletes, unload their bikes in the parking area at Ellacoya State Park for a circuit ride.

